
WORLD HERITAGE CULTURAL NOMINATION – IUCN COMMENTS

LOIRE VALLEY (FRANCE)

The nomination of the Loire Valley as a cultural landscape was discussed at the 1999 World Heritage Committee Meeting in Morocco. At this meeting there was a lengthy discussion with regard to this nomination and also in general in relation to cultural landscapes. It was generally recognized that the Loire Valley has outstanding universal value and includes values which meet World Heritage Cultural Criteria (ii) and (iv). However, several State Parties and IUCN raised concerns in relation to the inclusion of nuclear power stations within the boundary of the proposed World Heritage site.

The State Party submitted a complementary report on the Loire Valley in March, 2000 and this has been reviewed by IUCN. In line with agreed practice in relation to cultural landscapes, IUCN has submitted the comments below directly to ICOMOS and has included these comments within the overall IUCN evaluation report submitted to the World Heritage Centre.

IUCN has the following comments:

1. IUCN's view is that the credibility of the Convention is paramount. This has consistently been the position of IUCN. The debate should relate to this and not to the pros or cons of nuclear power. The issue is an unequivocal one: the appropriateness of large industrial developments, including nuclear power stations, within World Heritage sites inscribed under the Cultural Landscape category.
2. IUCN feels the World Heritage Committee should consider the message that a decision to inscribe this site, with nuclear power stations within its boundaries, could send to the outside world. That is, that, World Heritage sites, sites of outstanding universal value, can have large industrial developments, including nuclear power stations, within their boundaries. Few people will appreciate the finer points of what is or is not appropriate within a cultural landscape, in the context of debates at various World Heritage fora.
3. A decision to inscribe this site with the inclusion of nuclear power stations will set a negative precedent not only for other World Heritage sites but also for sites which command a lower level of protection. If the World Heritage Committee can accept a landscape with a nuclear power station within it as a World Heritage site, how can one argue against such developments in hundreds of lesser landscapes in Europe and elsewhere? This could therefore potentially amount to a serious challenge to the protection of landscape heritage within Europe and other regions.
4. IUCN believes that this argument raises the issue of cultural landscapes and their relation to the issue of their authenticity and integrity. IUCN notes that the essence of cultural landscapes, as defined in the Operational Guidelines, is that they should: be "illustrative of the evolution of human society and settlement over time"; that they "illustrate the essential and distinct cultural elements of ... regions"... and "the interaction between human kind and its natural environment." IUCN feels that, to accept nuclear power stations (or other large industrial developments) in this context, would miss the key issues of scale and authenticity. It is noted that they do not use local materials taken from the landscape (except river water for cooling); nor are they an illustration of "distinct cultural elements of ..." the region: they are the very antithesis of the concept of a sustainable interaction between nature and culture which the idea of cultural landscapes is supposed to capture.
5. IUCN strongly endorses and believes that this debate should not blur the significance nor the value of the cultural landscapes concept.

In conclusion, IUCN endorses the ICOMOS recommendation to inscribe Val de Loire under the criteria recommended but that, as well as the revisions to the boundaries made following referral to the State Party, the boundaries should be further revised to exclude the nuclear power stations.

At the twenty-fourth ordinary session the Bureau and the advisory bodies agreed to request the State Party to exclude the nuclear power plant from the nominated area and therefore to submit a proposal with revised boundaries. This revision was requested by 1 October 2000.